

GOOD GOVERNANCE AND COLONIAL ENTANGLEMENT IN BANGLADESH

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ABSTRACT

Good governance remains at quagmire in Bangladesh. Bad governance or mal-governance, is often surfacing with heavy tolls on people's expectations. There lie multiple causes beneath such discouraging state. In this article, employing post- colonial standpoint, we argue that the machinery of public administration or governance in Bangladesh culturally and psychologically is not ready to adopt the essence of good governance. The colonial mind set of the government officials and shadow colonial administrative culture are anti- thesis to the fundamental elements of good governance such as participatory and consensus oriented governing system. Therefore, the article ventures to suggest that to ensure the responsible, pro- citizen governance, the internalization of colonial cultural has to be elucidated or in Ngugi wa Thiong's language, the mind has to be decolonized.

KEYWORDS: *Good governance, decolonization, administrative culture.*

Introduction

The European colonies are no more. Decolonization process has produced independent nation states worldwide. But the lasting impact of colonialism has not dried out yet. Edward Said rightly pointed out that the past is rarely over and done with but haunts the present (Said, 1994). The colonial past has taken multiple forms in different cultural geographies in post- colonial nation states, particularly in global south.

Taking advantage of globalization and liberal economy, western countries undertake numerous developmental projects globally, the process often known as neo- colonialism. Kothari (2006) asserted that development in the mainstream is a neo -colonial project of modernity. Similarly, Lumumba-Kasongo (2011) argues that neo-colonialism as the ideological extension of colonialism in a different historical period and political context implying some sort of physical and institutional control over a region. However, among the domineering projects, since 1990s good governance became a ubiquitous entity in the developmental vocabulary of Post- colonial states, albeit governance indicators in these countries remained unchanged or declined over the years. If so, what went wrong?

The present paper delves to problematize the underlying facets of good governance in Bangladesh from a post- colonial viewpoint. We first attempt to delineate the conceptual ambiguity of good governance and move on to discuss the present status quo of governance in Bangladesh. Then, we proceed to analyze the colonial impact on Bangladesh administration, and tend to trace out the major roadblocks in the way to good governance, crystallizing both global and internal dimensions.

Conceptualizing Good Governance

Traditionally, the term governance was employed interchangeably with government. Today, the concept governance accommodates a network of partners from both inside and outside the government, where private organizations and civil society take a dominant role. Frederickson and Smith (2003) maintain that governance refers to lateral and inter-institutional relations in administration in the context of the decline of sovereignty, the decreasing importance of jurisdictional borders and a general institutional fragmentation. In similar vein, Rhodes (1997, 15) clarifies that governance "means that there is no one centre but multiple centers, there is no sovereign authority because networks have considerable autonomy". However, governance means the process of decision-making and the process by which

decisions are implemented (or not implemented) which can apply to corporate, international, national, local governance (UN ESCAP, 2009).

Good governance which was used for the first time as synonym of normative governance is epitomized by predictable, open and enlightened policy making; a bureaucracy imbued with professional ethos; an executive arm of the government accountable for its action; and a strong civil society participating in the public affairs; and all behaving under rule of law (World Bank Report, 1993). Bilney defines Good governance as means of the effective management of a country's social and economic resource in a manner that is open, transparent, accountable, equitable" (Bilney, 1994, p-17). However, Good governance can be summarized in ensuring six indicators: Voice and Accountability, Political Stability and absence of violence, Government Effectiveness, Regulatory Quality, Rule of Law and Control of Corruption. Since the idea is what ought to be done, a fundamental way to implement is to ensure a strong and more effective state.

State of Governance in Bangladesh

The modern system of governance in Bangladesh has evolved under the British colonial rule which was based on systematic classification, defined structure, merit-based recruitment, regular salary system, institutional training, and so on while characterized by elitism, secrecy, centralization, formalism, rigidity, and social isolation (Haque, 1999). The existing administration or governance in Bangladesh is following the global ideological transition to a neoliberal regime which is substantiated by neoclassical theories and neomanagerial practices. Like other developing countries, Bangladesh has been adopting massive policy reforms in its state mechanism under various structural adjustment programs. In Bangladesh, the government has endorsed the globally popular initiative known as "good governance"—especially under the auspices of the WB and the IMF—which recommends a smaller public sector and a stronger government-business relationship (Zafarullah, Khan and Rahman, 1997).

In showing the governance scenario of South Asia, Rehman commented "South Asia is united by a common thread of 'misgovernance'" (Rehman, 2000). The governance situation of Bangladesh is not so expectant. Bangladesh has been considered as 'a weak state with strong society' or 'a society without citizens' (Wood, 1997). It was rightly stated by (Lewis, 2011) that the society of Bangladesh is so strong but the services

provided to its citizens are so poor. Same picture is reflected in the work of Khan and Ara (2006) who maintained that both political and public officials in Bangladesh are not accountable and decision-making process is not transparent. The parliamentary government has been far away from satisfactory and corruption is a big obstacle of social mobilization.

Impact of Colonialism in the Governance of Bangladesh

The impact of colonialism is not over with the decampment of colonizers. Instead, it has lasting impression to the collective imagination of the colonized. The situation becomes more complicated in cases where the withdrawal of colonial rule does not lead to independence but to mere replacement of one by another dominant power (Huque 1997, 15). Albeit having positive impacts of colonialism on the post-colonial nation states, the leaders of independent states often follow the paths left by the colonial masters to rule their own people. Governments often become repressive, and strict control is exercised in the name of law and order.

Bangladesh has been the part of the British Empire for two centuries and subsequently, ruled by Pakistan repressively for twenty four years. The country came into being through the bloody battle in 1971. Although it had a fresh start, unexpectedly though, the impact of colonialism has remained on various aspects, mainly in the mechanisms of governance. Bureaucracy, who was sacred, isolated from the people to apply absolute power over the people in colonial period, has remained more or less unchanged. C. H. Kennedy (1987, 29-31) rightly pointed out that the bureaucratic structure which evolved to meet the competing needs of colonial administration and the aspirations of Indians to enter the civil service, had remained essentially unchanged.

Therefore, the bureaucrats of eastern wing of Pakistan perceived exclusion from its rightful share of power was a contentious issue and seen as a manifest injustice (Jahan 1972). Consequently, majority of them actively participated in liberation war of 1971 and ventured to reap the maximum benefits after the war. The factionalism among the public officials emerged, corruption climbed hugely, consequently, many bureaucrats became business personalities overnight. As the government faced numerous problems in the first few years of independence, efforts to streamline the system of administration could not be seriously undertaken. Although attempts were made to establish a

responsive and responsible machinery of administration, in the face of strong opposition from the bureaucracy, the Report of the Administrative and Services Reorganization Committee in 1972 could not be implemented (Khan 1987).

Consequently, the training of the bureaucrats and structure of the governance remained in a way that produces sort of their colonial state of mind. They failed to emerge as the friend of the people, instead, materialized as the ruler of them. Majority of them consider themselves superior to the civilians, sort of self and other relationship sustained over the years between the officials and citizens. The nature of the bureaucracy inherited by Bangladesh has been summed up by Zafarullah (1987, 459): “It was elitist in composition, narrow in outlook, insulated from the people, and non-responsive to the political leadership, as well as corrupt, antiquated, high-handed, and obsessed with the preservation of its status and privileges”. Despite such strong sentiments among the citizens, successive governments have been unable to curb the power exercised by this group. Furthermore, there have been efforts to win over the support of the bureaucracy in order to continue in power. The relationship between the civil servants and politicians continues to be an issue of concern as both parties argue their respective positions of vulnerability (Ali 1993, 113-23).

Good Governance in Bangladesh: a Post- colonial Approach

Bangladesh government has prioritized good governance extremely in developmental paradigms. In executing the prescriptions of International Organizations, government has undertaken massive reform schemes of established institutions and developing new bodies since 1990s. But the range of success still remains ambiguous. Therefore, it is worthwhile to interrogate, despite two decades of relentless exertion, why the good governance scenario is in quagmire. We have identified both global dimension and domestic facts behind its stagnation.

Good Governance and Global Governance

Good governance in developing countries is not alien to global governance. It is argued that good governance is a tool of the powerful used against the powerless in the name of global development. Therefore, the development projects of the west undertaken in the developing countries under the ambit of area studies are the instruments of neo- colonialism. Hamid Dabashi (2009) argues that today’s area studies projects of the

west are typically oriental reapplication of knowledge production. In colonial era, knowledge on the orient was used to produce to sustain colonial power and today, it is employed to fulfill their imperial ambition. Dabashi calls it the ‘empire without hegemony’ (Dabashi 2009, 213). Similarly, Ranger concludes that “colonial Africa was much more like post-colonial Africa than most of us have hitherto imagined. And its dynamics have continued to shape post-colonial society” (Ranger 1996:280, cited in Cheeseman 2006).

In order to understand how colonialism and development relationship is played out, it is suggested here that the shift from colonialism to development represents a process involving a redistribution of ideas, institutions, and people. Put differently, it involves the redistribution of power, control, and knowledge. Within such a ‘redistribution’ local officials and power holders, ‘westernized’ through their education and training, also act simultaneously as powerful transmitters of colonizing ideologies and as agents of change (Kothari 2006).

The links between colonialism and contemporary international development have recently, albeit belatedly and partially, been identified in the development literature particularly through post-colonial analyses (Sylvester, 1999). These and other post-colonial analyses understand both colonialism and development as projects of modernity and progress, in that both concepts reassert the dichotomies and classifications of ‘other’ and ‘difference’ that justify their Interventions (Said, 1994).

The intervention is primarily justified through the politics of foreign aid. Developed countries offer aid to the developing countries to improve the governance indicators, not without structural change of course. They impose conditions, which often end up as counterproductive to the genuine development of the aid receivers. Sometimes they prescribe homogeneous policies of the reforms, structural development for all the countries, regardless of their cultural and historical heterogeneity.

For example, like other developing countries, international development agencies provide wisdom and financial supports to Bangladesh to ensure good governance. They particularly have recommended for passing new laws, amending existing laws and capacity building of the institutions. For instance, major funding agencies have funded in the projects of capacity building of national human right commission, election commission, anti- corruption commission and so forth.

These initiatives are obviously much appreciative. Still it is relevant to ask: will the institutions succeed unless both citizens and employees of the institutions realize the need and applicability of institutional reforms as institutions are developed in light of the western concept not taking the indigenous cultural facets on board? Mamdani (1996) rightly shows, 'native' institutions were created by colonial rule and did not signify the end of colonial administration. A personal experience, while accomplishing internship with national human rights commission, June- July' 2013, shows that developmental organizations' effort to train up the officials through sophisticated foreign trainers often become futile as trainees are found nonchalant to the pressing national issues. The scenario emerges due to two fundamental causes: the methodologies and language of the experts seem alien to them and the poor education they received in educational institutions. But we notice, majority of the finances of the projects are spent in experts' salaries and logistics they require. K Krishna Prasad claims that 70 per cent of this money goes to people in the aid giving country either in the best case for so-called experts or in the worst case for buying goods made in the industrialized countries (Prasad 1997, 2594). Besides, the education system in Bangladesh is too weak to produce quality human resources.

In addition, the experts of good governance working in the post- colonial nation states are hired from the west without having any experience of working with the local people. Their placement criteria are no less than that of the colonial period. Groups of British development professionals in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, the British Council, the DFID, and in international organizations such as the World Bank, the UNDP, and the International Monetary Fund, continue to reside overseas, with often similar criteria for employment and placement as their colonial predecessors Kothari (2006, 129). Uma Kothari further shows how the colonial administrators are hired in international aid agencies for the developmental projects of third world countries and their experiences of colonialism are used in neo- colonialism. She argues that colonial officers and development consultants epitomize that justify the conceptual and empirical separation of the moment of colonialism and that of international development.

Colonial Administrative Culture and State of Mind

As far as the definition and the principles of good governance concern, albeit debated and not universal as shown, mass participation and responsiveness

are regarded as the key to success. It assures that corruption is minimized, the views of minorities are taken into account and that the voices of the most vulnerable in society are heard in decision making. It is also responsive to the present and future needs of society (unescap.org). Citizens' access to public authority and the presence of a monitoring regime to check how authority is exercised are important requirements for good governance (Alam and Teicher 2012).

How much citizens' access to public authority is visible in developing countries? In general it is negligible. Governance in Bangladesh has not succeeded in accomplishing public confidence owing to endorsing inequality in service. Evidently, the voice of the subaltern is subdued in decision making. Paradoxically, in one hand, government with the corroboration of transnational organizations uttering the rhetoric of good governance, on the other, rarely approaches are made to accommodate the public voice in policy formulations. We observe two major causes:

First, the bureaucratic mindset is not pro- citizen. As soon as they accomplish offices, a different state of mind sets up. They start thinking themselves superior to the other. Consequently, the way office bearers treat to the people is not dissimilar to the colonial administrators' behavior towards the colonized. In post- colonial novels we notice the typical oriental behavior of the colonial masters. We see how Ronny in E M Forster's *A Passage to India* and U Po Kyin in George Orwell's *Burmese Days* treat the native people. The masters are faultless while the servants are always faulty. Orwell (2009, 126) points out: "we always talk of them (natives) as though they had sprung up from ground mushrooms, with all their faults readymade. But when all's said and done, we are responsible for their existence."

This mindset does not develop automatically. The administrative structure, bureaucratic trainings are simply colonial reproduction. Structurally, high officials are kept isolated from popular sight. An invisible wall constructed and they are deliberately encompassed by the elites. Therefore, the governance agenda is not driven by demand from below, but by pressure from development partners from above.

Second, the administrative culture designed for good governance is without the indigenous cultural ingredients. Being unconscious regarding self and culture, elite administrators just execute prescribed tools built in strange culture, in esoteric language by alien people. African author Ngugi Wa Thiong'o in his fiction

Decolonizing the Mind depicts how neo-colonialism emerged and sustained in African states using the language and culture as a tool of domination. He says: "The bullet was the means of the physical subjugation. Language was the means of the spiritual subjugation" (Thiong'o 1986).

Therefore, for better governance in Bangladesh, mindset of the public offices requires to be decolonized. Authority must accommodate free thinking and spontaneous participation in decisions avoiding superior-inferior dichotomy. Franz Fanon rightly said, "No attempt must be made to encase man, for it is his destiny to be free" (Fanon 2005). He includes that in a post-colonial state governance, a whole set of rights and responsibilities for citizens is to be judged authentic and it must be open, accountable, and participatory. He wished to see democracy and equality practiced in daily life, not just every four years or so: in factories, administrative offices, cooperative farms, schools and universities, as well as within the small army and large militia forces (Adam 1993).

With the change of personal self, both rulers and citizens, the administrative culture has to be transformed. Modern culture and language need to be negotiated with the traditional. The space of using language as the means of the spiritual subjugation by the elites must be removed. The responsibilities of civil societies and intellectuals are prime in ensuring governance within native culture through mass participation. Ngugi claimed that neo-colonialism sustains with the consensus of the academics, judiciaries and intellectuals. Therefore unless they fan the fire of revolt against oppression and raise, general people won't get their voice. Similarly, Fanon expects these revolutionary intellectuals to avoid the capital city and live among the rural masses (Adam 1993). Ethuin (2013) urges for principles of humanity and mutual respect of cultures seem to be basic ingredients to develop ideas of good governance that are free from Eurocentric prejudice and non-Western malapropism. Hence, culture of governance must take under massive transformation through establishing harmony between modern as well as self and cultural. People can enjoy the positive humanistic, democratic, and revolutionary elements in literatures and cultures and without any complexes about their own language, their own self, their environment (Thiong'o 1986).

Conclusion

The paper has traced out the practical problems faced in executing good governance from post-colonial landscape. It observes the lasting colonial impact in the imagination of the governance, counterproductive to the good governance goals. The cardinal features of good governance such as mass participation and responsive decision found missing in the psyche of isolated, pro-elitist bureaucrats. We have shown two fundamental facts responsible for present scenario: first, the good governance project itself is the product of neo-colonialism project and second, the mindset of the administrators reflects the colonial shadow.

We have shown the clandestine objectives of the global North sustaining their dominance over the South through these projects and how foreign aids taken away by hiring their experts and forcing to buy logistics. Structurally, the training methodology and administrative culture of Bangladesh remain in the shadow of colonialism. Consequently, public officials do not treat the citizens as friend, rather 'the other'. Like the colonial administrators, they regard themselves superior and isolate within the so called elites. Evidently, decision made by them serve the interests of the haves, not the have nots. Against these back drop, we urge to situate good governance in Bangladesh not imposed by the global south, but within native cultural, through home grown experts. We want the bureaucratic mindset decolonized, administrative decisions pro-citizen through mass participation.

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